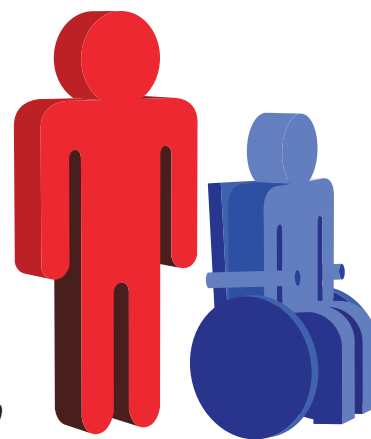


Dialogue



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Interview with an Intern Coordinator – Daniela DeCaro, Governor Patrick's Constituent Services Office

For the Governor of a dynamic Commonwealth with a population of more than 6.5 million people, his Constituent Services Office is in many ways a hub of his governing operation. The constituent services office describes itself as the first point of contact between the public and the Governor's office. In the midst of this busy hub sits Daniela DeCaro, responsible for supervising the steady stream of interns who come to the Governor's Office to learn, to serve, and to make their mark on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Daniela freely admits that there is no way the Constituent Services Office could function without the assistance of the interns. "We treat them like staff," she explains. "We trust them a lot!" There are telephone calls to answer, opinion calls to respond to, citizen accomplishments to acknowledge, comments on behalf of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor to draft, and lots and lots of mail to open, sort, log, track and file.

It takes a special kind of intern to jump into such a mix, but Governor Patrick's Constituent Services office has found excellent ones through the state's Model Employer for People with Disabilities summer youth internship program. Through the coordination efforts of the Massachusetts

Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), students in the program are placed into summer internships in state government offices, and rewarded with a small personal stipend. They get a taste of what it's like to work in a professional environment – and to bring home a paycheck.

When the program first began in the summer of 2009, Daniela and the others in the office were wide open to the idea and the possibilities of hosting one of these interns. "We'll find a way to make it work," was their attitude. Accommodations were easier and more readily available than even they imagined. The visual impairment of their first intern through the model employer program was easily accommodated with the simple installation of JAWS screen reader software and the connecting of a scanner to her computer. Both were provided by MCB for the duration of the internship. With that, the intern was able to log and track the constituent calls she took, to draft response letters, and to work on an extensive research project regarding Massachusetts high school students accepted to United States military academies. "I had constituents call back looking for her, she did such a great job," Daniela says. "She is smart! She goes to



**The Commonwealth:
Working to be a Model Employer**

college, she lives in a dorm, she is fully capable. It just took those two little things.”

An open mind to start with and a good experience that made them open to doing it again led Governor Patrick’s Constituent Services Office to Carlos Aponte, who held an internship with the office this past summer. Under the initial guidance of Carlos’ MRC counselor, Daniela and her colleagues discovered that Carlos’ unique skills and talents made him the perfect fit for the role he took of managing the mail processing and distribution for the entire office. After an introduction to the tasks, Carlos quickly learned the ins and outs of the mail, the subject categories, and the distribution process. “That became something that he owned,” says Daniela.

For an intern coordinator like Daniela, the most rewarding part of hosting interns is being able to see tangible growth and development in these

young people over the course of the internship, to see them overcome challenges and difficulties and become bold and confident in their mastery over a task, or over subject matter that was previously unfamiliar. Daniela was especially impressed with what she saw in the interns who came to her office through the Model Employer youth internship program. “I’m glad I had such a good experience with these interns,” she says. Such an internship opportunity “is about interacting with the public. It’s working with the governor, moving Massachusetts forward. Working with the public prepares you well for almost anything, there are so many different situations. This will prepare interns for the business world.” All people have an important role to play in the flourishing of society. Through the Model Employer youth internship program, these young men and women are making their mark on the future.

A major goal of the “Strategic Plan to Make Massachusetts a Model Employer for People with Disabilities” is to support internships and other job awareness and training opportunities for people with disabilities. Below are some best practices that everyone can follow in order to run a successful internship program.

Best Practices for Internship Programs

The initial phase of creating an internship program is vital to its success for both the supervisor and the intern. By establishing core components and structures interns will develop the training and skills necessary to become gainfully employed whether in an entry level or professional position in the future. The goal of the internship is for interns to develop the knowledge and skills appropriate to specific public sector positions as well as the general work expectations such as promptness, commitment and persistence.

There are several essential characteristics common to all successful internships:

- 1. Structure the internship so that the work environments encountered by the intern are representative of real work experiences.**
 - 2. A well written job description leads to a well matched intern.**
 - 3. Match the amount and level of work to the intern’s skills.**
 - 4. Interns should be offered opportunities to apply their skill sets as well as be given opportunities to grow professionally. The satisfaction an intern feels with the work experience can influence his or her work ethic and behavior.**
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Interview with a Model Employer Intern:

Carlos Aponte

As far as first jobs go, a summer internship where you get to meet the Governor of Massachusetts and make special deliveries all around the State House is not a bad way to start. For Carlos Aponte, a sophomore at Salem State University majoring in criminal justice, an internship with Governor Deval Patrick's Constituent Services Office opened up a world of work and realistic expectations about employment. This was Carlos' first job, and as much as he made a positive impact on the office in which he served, the job made an important impact on him and set the stage for the future.

Carlos doesn't necessarily want a career in politics, but he does want a career, and he did want a chance to learn – outside the classroom – how government functions in Massachusetts. He heard about the internship through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), and he boldly went for it, even though he was the only MRC intern in the office. "I was extremely nervous going into this internship," Carlos admits. But "in the end I learned a great deal of knowledge and am glad I had this amazing experience."

Despite those initial nerves, the intern supervisors in the office saw a lot of growth in Carlos as he quickly settled into the rhythm of the job and became more comfortable

with the work and with his colleagues. Carlos saw the growth in himself as well, and was pleased to learn how to better communicate with colleagues (not to mention the governor) as well as with members of the general public who came into the office looking for help.

Carlos' main job responsibility was the handling of all the mail for the busy office. "A typical day for me at the job would involve me collecting and opening the Governor's mail, and delivering mail all around the State House. I would occasionally do other things, such as organizing paperwork when it was necessary," he explains. This was more of a meticulous process than Carlos' humble description conveys. His daily efforts with the mail, as well as on other

projects and tasks, were essential to the smooth running of the office. "I think I made a great impact on the office," Carlos says with confident self-awareness. "I was the one who delivered all the letters and took care of other time-consuming things that had to be done when everybody else was occupied."

The time-consuming nature of good work was an important lesson Carlos learned about employment. Thanks to this internship experience, he is prepared for that. "I anticipate this will help me in the future because it has shown me the type of skills I need to have a great career in any of my future employments." Having "Internship in the Governor's Office" on his resume won't hurt either.

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Are we making progress?

Figure 1. The Percentage of Executive Branch Employees who Self-Identify as Having a Disability from March 2007 to September 2010

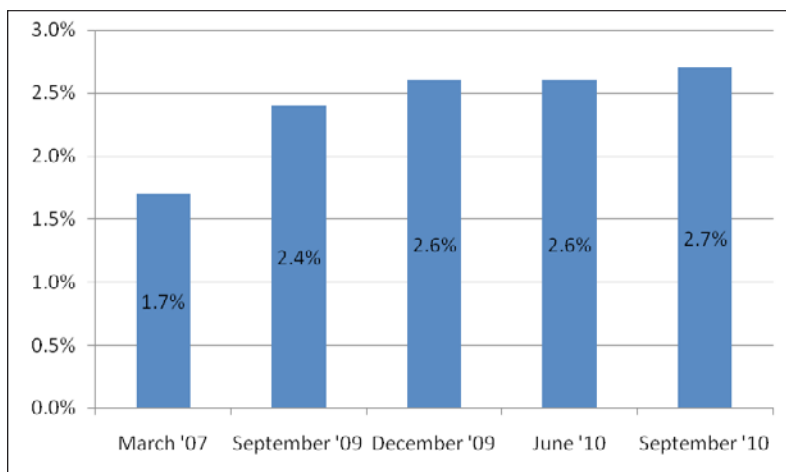


Figure 2. The Majority of Executive Branch Employees who have Self-Identified as Having a Disability are in Professional Positions

